

Civil Rights History Project
Interview completed by the Southern Oral History Program
under contract to the
Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African American History & Culture
and the Library of Congress, 2011

Interviewee: James O. Jones
Interview Date: May 25, 2011
Location: Mr. Jones's home, Austin, Texas
Interviewer: Joseph Mosnier, Ph.D.
Videographer: John Bisho
Length: 52:52 minutes (Part 2 of 2)

John Bishop: We're on the road again.

James Jones: Okay.

Joe Mosnier: Mr. Jones, I want to ask about [clears throat] a couple of things, thinking about [clears throat] being together with other people doing this intense work.

JJ: Umm.

JM: One is the – your reflections and perspective on being with people in such intense circumstances, the relationships, the human dynamics of that kind of experience.

JJ: Umm.

JM: And also the interracial aspect of that –

JJ: Um-hmm.

JM: In your specific circumstances there in Pine Bluff, and then in SNCC Arkansas, because of what will come to happen.

JJ: Um-hmm. The, um, the involvement, the interracial involvement, made everything more difficult on the white side *and* the black side. On, on the black side, there was a lot of growing resentment toward whites being involved, because they were being perceived as the lead part, not black folks themselves, though that was not the case, but that's what they saw and they saw a lot of that through Bill Hansen. Um, when we would go to the, um, uh, meetings – like we'd have meetings, mass meetings, and trying to recruit people in the neighborhood or trying to get something started – we specifically made an effort for me to launch it. Because when the whites would, um, try and launch it, it would just kind of die dead, no response, and it always would be a thing where the black folk want to hear my answers on that. So, that really stalled meetings and efforts to strategize real bad.

On the, uh, racial – on the racial side, I think, um, there was a hardcore resentment in the case of Bill and Ruthie [Buffington]. Interracial marriage right there in Little Rock, I mean right there in Arkansas, that was just a no-no. And I think when things were getting a little quiet sometimes, when whites would see that, it would fl back up. That's what it's all about, you know. You know, and so that was a – and then that's really what generated the – what generated the thinking is that we got to officially make Jim Jones the head of this to get rid of that, because that's just too much of a – too much.

Because when we would go to protest, there was so much focus on the whites, you really couldn't get kind of through to talk about what we were trying to do, uh, because their attitude was, "What's with the white boys? They don't need to go – there ain't no problem with them going to a Holiday Inn and stay. They're just here to make trouble." That's how they perceived it, so that made it more difficult. And when I took charge of it, I told Bill, "You stay at the office

and coordinate some stuff. Let us run this thing.” And then, that made it – the crowd was a lot more comfortable. And I think we were growing in numbers when that move was made, as well.

JM: When you needed to shift into these [clears throat] more prominent, consistently prominent roles, because obviously you had plenty of prominent roles all the way along, but, um – and the, and the project director title shifted to you in '64, how did Hansen – and were there implications for your relationship, your working relationship, your personal relationship? How did that go off?

JJ: No. No, that stayed pretty good. But, uh, but, uh, Hansen was a very aggressive, very aggressive person. And we – and I had to really shut him down a lot of times in situations. I said, “Now, there are some places we need to target,” like the voter registration stuff. And I made a specific point, “Forrest City, you know, Helena, West Helena, uh, Marianna – those are hardcore [5:00] conservative hate areas, because all that part of Arkansas is where all them big plantations was.” And I said, “And we’ve got to be careful, because I think there are some of them, as we call them, them good ol’ boys, uh, see me and you – I think, uh, the shot gonna be fired at you.”

And, uh, he didn’t want to do none of that, but, but, but me and Grinage and all of us said, “No. I’m going.” You know, “There comes a time when, you know, we’ve planted the seed and got things going, you know, and we’ve got our little group together, that’s okay. But for you to come out, you know, in a lead capacity over there, that’s too dangerous. You’re endangering too many people.”

Uh, and he was – he was very, uh – he didn’t want to do that, because, uh, uh, though he didn’t say it and never would admit it, he liked that limelight. [Laughs] He liked it! [Laughs] He liked it but he’d swear he didn’t. “Yes, you do! You love reading your name. You love

getting hit in the head, [laughs] and then run up to a camera and show the blood on you. That ain't what it's about." And I knew when we went to those places they were going to respond to the color of my skin, because it was – all the whites who they knew in those neighborhoods were folk they didn't like. "And we don't need you to add to it."

And when we, uh – now, and when I got – the first place I went was, uh, Forrest City. Now, Forrest City surprisingly responded kind of quickly. And I think it had to do with, uh, uh, Mrs. Clay. She owned a funeral home and she had a big old house. And she said, "Y'all come and take that house. You can stay there." And then, she had a sister or a cousin who was a principal, and I think she had that, the professional folks, you know, around her. And when we went – we went to her house, and she called them all over there.

And we told them what – I said, "No, we're not trying to integrate, uh, something here in Forrest City. But it's such a *huge* base" – that part of Arkansas is ninety percent black – "and the voting over here is zero." And so, I think that issue was a little easier than cracking the restaurants and going to the jail. But, uh – no, no, no, there were – there were some issues there, and I think the issue had to do with, uh, uh, Bill didn't want to relinquish his role. But we kind of got through it, but that was – we had to get tough with him. "No! Stay here!" We had to do it that way.

JM: Yeah.

JJ: Yeah.

JM: I'm going to ask more about the voting work and registration work and other parts of the program in the Delta, but let me first ask: How did you – did you go to Atlanta occasionally? Did folks come from Atlanta from SNCC to – how did the relationship with the national folks work out?

JJ: Most of it, most of it was I would take trips down there, and they would have those we called, uh, coordinating meetings. And that's where all the different states that was involved, had all these SNCC people, we would come there and we would exchange thoughts and ideas: What are you doing here, how did you overcome that, and a lot of that. So, I got a good feel, a good feel for it.

But, uh, one of the things that I felt differently about was I thought I had a better feel for people in Arkansas because I had a farm background. A lot of the folk back in those days somewhere were farm-connected. And when I got to Atlanta and would go down there, all them boys were big-city boys, and they would just be sitting up articulating. And, uh, in order to say, "We're going to go, uh, down the road to a store," it'd take them three hours, because they had these educated kids, and they was articulating what they know and all the big words, and I'd just be sitting there, saying "What are they – what are y'all doing?"

It was – [10:00] I saw a lot of showing off their education and not a good feel for the neighborhood. That never was part of the – and when they, uh – and when they would ask me to make comments, I would talk very specific about the level of folks I was dealing with, and what the issues there, and that I don't think that's going to happen until blah-blah-blah-blah. And so, old Jim Forman told me one time, he said, he said, "Jones, what you are doing is a real direct connection to the community. That's a *wonderful* thing."

And he said, and he asked me, he said, "Do you want, uh – do you want us to send some people?" But I said, "Well, not really, but I tell you what I would like to do. There is – you've got a group down there that's a great singing group. Send that group up here to one of those meetings I have, because I have a *lot* of people, and they're church folks. They'll love that!"

And I said, “And let’s slowly graduate.” But those guys, you know, when they came and saw that big crowd, all they wanted to do was sing, have a good time, and went on back. [Laughs]

But, uh – but what I was doing was, uh, asking people, uh, to put your shoes on and let’s go knock on some doors and try to get people to vote. And then, I said also, I told Mrs. Clay, “Mrs. Clay, we need some – a couple of folks to run for something, but they need to be educated, they need to be highly respected.” And then, she told me that, uh, this guy that was – they had a little plant in Forrest City. I think it was a garment factory. She said, “Well, that guy over there, he’s been promoted to manager.” I said, “Let’s run him.” And we did, and – but it wasn’t like the mayor or nothing, but it was a position – and he won.

And folks said, “I never thought it was going to happen.” I said, “Well, you do have to make an effort to make it happen.” And he went on and did real well. And I said, “And that’s what – that’s the kind of stuff we need to do as well as, uh,” I said, “You know, we don’t have to, we don’t have to go into a white restaurant and eat.” [Laughs] So, if somebody do want to do that, you know, uh, they can. You know, so, uh, so that’s, that’s – that’s the direction I went.

JM: Yeah. The SNCC program seemed to have those three big thrusts: [clears throat] public accommodations, where you could do that; then, uh, the whole voter registration and starting to run people in electoral campaigns; and, um, education, too – you were talking about the schools question, too. Um, I’ve read that the – I’ve seen the numbers for what the SNCC program accomplished in short order, I mean, in pretty darn short order –

JJ: Oh, yeah.

JM: Twenty-four months, less than that, depending on what number you’re looking at. Um, more people signing up despite the poll tax still persisting; a *lot* of candidates get into races.

JJ: Right. Exactly.

JM: There's the '66 governor's race outcome, which is a curious thing, because of the black vote.

JJ: Um-hmm, um-hmm. [Steady sound tone begins]

[Recording stops and then resumes]

JB: We're rolling.

JM: Okay, we're back on after a short break for equipment. Uh, Mr. Jones, we were starting to talk about the program, the SNCC program, the work out there, and the voting work, getting people into races, and let me just turn it over to you.

JJ: Now, in some cases, folks fell short in vision, because there were individuals who "public accommodation" was all they had in their head. And, you know, once you integrate or desegregate, and all the restaurants has opened their doors, and you can go in the, uh, uh, go into town and get you a room, to me, that's finished. But we had some folks who, you know, looked long distance, "Well, let's go – let's go to Chicago and protest!" [Laughs] That's an example, because that was the onliest focus they had. And – and those are the folks, uh, were in Arkansas. I said, "No. You know, no, that – we need to – this population needs to, you know, access voting and start running candidates, you know." And that was a new, new piece to it. But some folks were stuck.

JM: Um-hmm.

JJ: I mean, they were stuck and couldn't get off that.

JM: Yeah. Describe a [15:00] – the, the, your experience across a [clears throat], a representative week, doing voter registration work in the Delta, fall of '63, early '64. What happens to you in that week? And who do you see, and what's it like, and how's it feel?

JJ: When – my approach to it is, in every community, almost every community, there is that woman, and in most cases, it was women, and, uh, I learned that from – that lady’s name was Derworth, in Gould, [Arkansas], Mrs. Derworth. And she said, “Young man, when you go into a neighborhood, um, for the first time, if there’s a black barbershop there, go in there.” I said, “Okay.” “And you ask for specific type people: ‘I’m looking for somebody that’s, um, that’s interested in politics, or knows some good people that could run for office, or they have a lot of influence.’” She said, “Those gossiping men in them barbershops know that stuff!”

So, when I went to Forrest City, I took that advice. And, uh, I pulled up, and there was about four or five guys out there. You know, I think these were working people on a break. And I said, “I’m –” introduced myself. And I didn’t say I was SNCC. I said, “I’m part of a program, and we’re trying to encourage, uh, black folks to vote more. And, and, even better than that, we would like to see more black folks run for office.” And when I said that, the first thing came – like, all three of them said the same thing: “You need to go talk to Mrs. Clay.” I said, “Now, who is Mrs. Clay?” “She owns the funeral home. Her husband died, but she, she, she made an even bigger funeral home. That’s who you need to talk to.”

And, uh, so, I have a little Volkswagen. I said, “Well, how do I get there?” “Well, come on. Follow me!” They like actually introduced me to her! And she was raring – she was raring to go! She said, “Young man, I’m just glad to see you. It’s *long* overdue!” She was all excited! And, uh, she said, “I told my sister –” I said, “What’s your sister?” She said, “She’s the principal over there, and just the two of us talk all the time.” She got on that phone and dialed her up.

And, uh, and she said, “How you want to do it?”

I said, uh, I said, “First of all, uh, I need a place to stay. I probably need to stay two or three days.” She said, “See that house right there? See that house right there? See that house right there?” I said, “Yeah.” “All them are my house. Which one you want?” [Laughing] I said, “I just need somewhere to sleep.” [Someone coughs] And, uh, man, she was there fixing people up, and her sister came over. And she said, told about this preacher. She said, “He’s a very aggressive preacher, but he’s by himself.” Went over there, and I said, “Well, we need to have a meeting.” And those two women said, “We’ll do the calling. You just go on over there.” I don’t know who all they called, but they had a church packed that night. And then, that’s when this guy’s name came up. He was there. They said, “You know everybody. And all the working folks here – if all of them just vote for him he going to win.” [Laughs] And that’s how they got started. So, that seed was there, but it was just sitting still, you know.

And then, that’s when I started – uh, I said – I made a point to go back there later on, and I said, “I followed your advice.” She said, “In every community, there’s that type person.” And then when I went to other places, you know, I was always looking for that type. And I got to West Helena, that little lady over there – I can’t think of these names anymore – she had a, she had a store, run a little store. And I walked up to her and introduced myself and I said that, uh, what I was doing, and I’m trying to encourage people to vote and, and we are – run for candidate. She said, “I ran two years ago, but I didn’t have no votes, because these folks –.” She said, “I’d love to work with you!” And she said, “Park your car!” We took off! [Laughs]

So, I don’t know if – she said, “Well, I’m getting kind of old now. But, uh, my son just finished college down at Pine Bluff, and, uh, I’m going to talk to him about running.” But she was able [20:00] to rally those type meetings. And a few years later, after I’d gone, I learned there’s a lot more elected folks started – you know, that, that caught on and took off.

JM: Um-hmm.

JJ: And I said, “Well, I’m –” uh, by then, when I went back through there and learned some things, and I met a – I met a – what’s this guy? He’s an attorney in Little Rock. What’s his name? I chatted with him. And he said, “Yeah, some good things have been going down.” He worked with – they had a health clinic in Marianna. And, uh, Bill Clinton appointed him, I understand, as a federal judge. What’s that guy’s name? Oh, shoot, shoot! Uh, it’ll come to me. And then, he said, “Oh, it’s a lot of good things that’s going on in east Arkansas, I mean east Arkansas.” And then that’s where I – I stayed in that circle until I left, you know, because I didn’t want to just be “accommodations,” because I thought we had gotten past that a little bit.

JM: Yeah, yeah. Public accommodations. Yeah. Before we turn to some of the reasons that you departed in ’65 and moved to Atlanta, um, what was your mood? What was your sense of relative gains, challenges not met? How were you feeling about your work out there in those, from the fall of ’63 onward?

JJ: Well, you know, I felt good, because, uh, I have a personality of incredible tolerance. And when I go out to do things and folks don’t participate or we don’t get it done, I don’t get disgusted. I don’t get mad. I just say to myself, “Well, we can’t win them all.” And I’ve always been that type of person. But I also learned is, uh, [phone rings] um, my personality has helped me a lot. [Phone rings] You know, I don’t get mad with folks. I don’t pick and choose, and I can take it. You dog me, talk about me, and it doesn’t bother me at all. And so, I don’t see it as a failure. You know, sometimes I’ve said, you know, I wish we could have done or could have gotten a bigger role of folks participating, but it doesn’t bother me, uh, that it didn’t.

And I’m real – I’m very realistic about things. Um, I have never put my eyes on – when I look at doing things, I work at it hard and very diligent, but if it’s – if fifteen people step up and

really work at getting it done, some folks – it’s just like in church, some folks, um, you can get a lot done. But some folks think if you can’t get seventy-five people to help you, it’s a failure. I say, “No, seventy-five, seventy-five people will be a problem for *you*. [Laughs] So, let’s get a small group that’s got high energy, ready to go.” And that’s the way I’ve always worked. And, and I think, uh, because I’ve, uh, I always could recruit people and identify, folks took off and did a lot of things.

I remember I was in, uh, Georgia, um, and I went to a little town. What was that town called? And I went down to this little town, and this was, uh –

JM: When you went?

JJ: Yeah.

JM: When you worked on the Sharecroppers Fund?

JJ: Um-hmm.

JM: Yeah.

JJ: And I went to this town, and there was a little town where they had a little factory, and they had left town, and *everybody* was unemployed. So, when I got there, I said, “Well –,” [clears throat] I went and met with this schoolteacher. She was a very prominent woman in the neighborhood, and I said, “Well, I’d like to have a little meeting.” She said, “I can get the people to come out.”

And when they all came out [laughs] to the meeting – this is a *big* meeting – they have this big warehouse sitting there. I said, “Wow, that’s a big warehouse,” and it was shut down. So, I said, “Well, what would, uh – [25:00] any thoughts about what you would like to do?” Everybody in this building had these big thoughts of – like building a seventy-five story, uh, high-rise building, and all kind of wild stuff.

And I said, "Can I make a comment on something I see with my eyes?" "Yes, go ahead."
I said, "If a plant comes here, and y'all get a chance to go to work," I said, "I see so many babies, so many kids, I don't think nobody in this room could go to work!" [Laughing] So, they all started laughing and they said, "Mr. Jones, you're right!" [Laughs] For you to go to work you've got to have somewhere to leave – you've got five or six kids?! I said, "One thing I would suggest is y'all need to consider a nursery to keep kids." I mean, that town was *saturated* with little kids. I'm thinking everybody had five kids, six, ten!

And this lady said, "My brother," and that big warehouse? That was her brother's warehouse. She said, "My brother's got a big warehouse." But she said, "He is such a hustler, he ain't going to let you have that." I said, "What kind of hustler?" She said, "He's a big-time gambler, and he loves money. He ain't gonna do nothing." So, I said, "Let me – I'd like to, uh, meet him." She said, "I'll call him."

So, he came to the meeting, fifty-five-year-old kind of guy, maybe sixty. I said, "Sir, in order for this town to even think about going to work –" there was some other work in their little town, but they couldn't go to work with nobody to take care of the kids – I said, "We – if we could build a nursing home {Jones likely means nursery} here for these kids to be taken care of, I think a lot of – most of these women here could find work." He said, "You think so?" I said, "I think so." Because, see, I'd already talked to this, this, this, uh, uh, this, um, big, uh, Army, uh, uh, Roberts, some place [Warren Robins Air Force Base]. It's a big, big, big military, and they were hiring a lot of people, and it was common labor.

JM: Um-hmm.

JJ: So, I said, "And that's your warehouse?" He said, "Yeah." I said, "That big warehouse could be turned into –" I said, "What you going do with it?" He said, "I ain't going

do nothing with it.” I said, “We could turn that big warehouse into, uh, one heck of a nursery, and these folk would have a place to keep these kids, and they could go to work.” He said, “Well, Mr. Jones, if you could get, get that, get it renewed, and it needs a lot of work on it, I’ll *give* it to the group.” [Laughs] He said, “I’ll give it to the group.” That’s what he said.

I said, “Ladies, we got work to do.” They said, “What we got to do?” I said, “Me and all of y’all are going over there, and we’re going to tear that whole house out, tear all that wall down, and we’re going to put all that board out there on the street, and we’re going to call the city and tell them to come pick it up.” And I said, “Y’all ready to do that?” “You gonna make us do that?” “Yes ma’am, all you – every woman in town.” They showed up!

And the thing that was so beautiful about this – when the – there was a big lumber company in this next town. And this guy had taken some lumber somewhere, and he came by, and all these women – *pow, pow!* And that guy, he said, “Come here, son. You, uh, you’re the onliest man I see. What – are you in charge of this?” I said, “Yes sir. I told those women we want to tear down this place, rip out the inside, and we’re going to turn it into a nursery, so all these women with all [30:00] these babies can go to work.” That guy said, “Down there at the, uh –,” he said, “Down there at the, at the, um, at the – what?” Some Robert, some Robert, but it’s a big, um, um, Navy –

JM: Military, yeah.

JJ: Navy base or something like that. He said, “Man, they would love to have these women come down there, because they’re way short.” He said, “You got any money to pay –?” I said, “No, um-um. We – it’s just sweat and blood!” He said, “Let me go talk to my boss.” Warner Roberts [Robins] – that’s the name of the place!

JM: Yeah!

JJ: Yeah, that's the name of the place! This, uh, this guy went down there, and it was about five-thirty he came back. He said, "You know what? I've got some good news." He said, "If them women going to do all that building," he told me, said, "All that lumber out there," he said, "It's been a little rained on, but it's still good. You just – you take it up there."

Man! Them women built that thing, and the guy who owned it he came up there. He said, "Man, are you God-sent? Or you ain't Jesus Christ, are you? [Laughing] How did you get them women to do all that work?" [Laughs] I said, "They're doing it for themselves." And we got this huge – man, that thing, that thing was about two blocks, three blocks in size.

And so, this one lady said, "Can't you get federal money?" I said, "Let me tell you about that. No, you don't want that. If we get federal money for this, the federal government will make you put square feet per child. You won't get a third of them kids in that building. But if you're private, like you are – you own it – you can stack them in like sardines. [Laughs] And all of y'all that's not working, don't get a job, you come down here, and y'all become the group that take care of all these babies. And all of y'all that get a job, y'all start giving them a few dollars for taking care of these kids." Just like that, man, that thing just took off!

JM: That's great.

JJ: Just took off.

JM: Yeah.

JJ: And, uh, and *long* after I left, I would get little cards from folks saying, "This works so well, and we would love to see you come back and visit." That's been years ago.

JM: Wow.

JJ: You know, and it's always just – you know, I've just kind of been a little gifted on that side –

JM: Yeah, yeah.

JJ: Just seeing things and just –

JM: Sure.

JJ: And believe that folks can do it pretty good themselves, you know, so.

JM: Let's talk a little bit, as we kind of move towards our last section of the interview, um, to talk about some of the reasons, some of the things that were happening in SNCC nationally, how they reverberated in Arkansas, some of the things that happened in Arkansas, and then how you made your transition over.

JJ: Um-hmm.

JM: Um, we've talked earlier about '64: The directorship passes formally into your hands. You've talked about Bill Hansen. There are other whites that had come in and were coming in in that time, so the – I think the SNCC [clears throat], excuse me, the SNCC staff '64, '65ish in Arkansas would have been about eight people fulltime, sort of, uh, full staffers, and, uh, four black, four white. Um, the tensions are becoming a little more closely felt on the racial leadership of the organization question. '65 is a pretty hot summer nationally, first riots and all, and the whole question of the integrationist model is now being challenged by lots of folks. Things aren't, especially – you know, we've talked about economic – difficulties of moving on the economic front. It's just getting – you know, like you said earlier, some people's vision went to public accommodations. After you desegregate what then? How do you finally get to the economic justice issue underlying all this stuff?

So, with all that as kind of prelude, I'm interested in your perspective on, through that '64-65 period, how those questions played out inside your life, in SNCC in Arkansas, and how you – the circumstances that led to your move to move away.

JJ: Well, you know, my moving away, and, is – was, um, what I saw and what I felt was the resources and the use of people was, uh, dwindling. And a lot of the folks who had that energy early was beginning to drift toward going to work to make a living. People were getting older. The SNCC [35:00] group was young and high-energy and educated, and this whole Movement was a fun thing. And a lot of folk was not recognizing we're getting older, we're becoming family folks, resources are dwindling, and that was a natural thing to me. But a lot of the white kids who have come down wanted that to be a lifetime situation. But what we were dealing with was not lifetime. Uh, a lot of the kids that we had worked with that we saw do wonderful things in SNCC and all of that – they, too, had hit college level and gone on.

And when me and my wife – and I said this to Bill Hansen and all them, “Look, guys, this, this – we have done a pretty good job. And we're going to *ruin* it if we keep stretching it and stretching it, and we ain't doing nothing. There's no means of income.” And that's when folks started peeling off, because I think the Black Panthers and Stokely [Carmichael] and all that, they saw that Movement dwindling, too, and they were trying to rebuild them some little new, new, uh, new things and get it going, since this has kind of ended.

And then, I think – to me, I think SNCC sort of, uh, went as far as its capabilities. And we had to recognize that we got older and needed jobs to support families, and we had seen black elected officials come in, and I thought that was, that was very successful. But there were a lot of folks – and, you know, there still are, still people who think we still should be doing that. No, uh-uh. It's not the same. It's changed. People have changed. No. Yeah, there are conditions all around, but it does not fit – I don't think it fits a SNCC-type activity that we were doing. I think we did pretty good fueling folks' growth, but, uh, I don't think we could be a lifetime instrument for that. Yeah.

JM: You were in Atlanta, but, um – and busy, I'm sure, traveling quite a bit for the Sharecroppers Fund, right?

JJ: Um-hmm.

JM: Yeah. Um, but in '66 in the spring, obviously, John Lewis is ousted at SNCC, and Stokely Carmichael comes in. And one last thing I want to ask about kind of what's – or maybe two things – left behind, or things that will happen in Arkansas while you're now on the East Coast. Um, one is, um, Grinage is – feels compelled to basically make a statement [JB coughs] challenging the abandonment of the integrationist model, and Stokely Carmichael actually comes to Arkansas and has things to say about Grinage, in fact. [JB coughs] So, I'm interested in if you had a – at the time, you were a long ways away. I don't know if you kind of watched that at that time or not. That's one thing. The other thing is, um, uh, the emergence in Arkansas, in Little Rock anyway, of Bobby Brown and the Black Youth United, and if you bumped up against that at all or knew those folks.

JJ: I didn't, you know, uh, bump into it, but, you know, I heard about it and knew what was taking place. I think, uh, the way I perceived that was that was going to be a very small faction, and it was going to be very satisfying to Brown and was going to be very satisfying to Stokely. But I don't think they were focusing on anything that was going to be helpful to people. They were on their one-way trip and they were ego-ing on it. And both of those guys *always*, way back in the early days of SNCC, wanted to be the top gun, but they didn't have an audience. And that's what that is, and that's nothing else, you know.

Uh, I remember [40:00] a long time ago, uh, Stokely was trying to carve out him a group, because he wanted to be the next Malcolm X. And that's all that was. He wasn't focused on benefits of trying to make situations better and different. He just wanted that, you know, that star

in his hat. And I never was interested in that, you know. I think you have to sort of try to make a difference the best you can, but to go out there on your own and carve you out a little spot, I think that's – to me, that's a waste of time. And it's not going anywhere, you know. It gets you a lot of media and all this kind of stuff, but it's nothing, it's nothing else, I don't think.

No, I, I was in tune and knew about all of that, but none of that was anything I – when I was, uh, with the Sharecroppers, one of the things that, uh, I had to deal with is – that was small farmers' stuff – you always had guys who wanted to go attack the white man, attack FHA [Farmers Home Administration], and take their money, and just go find all the black farmers and just throw all the money out there to them. [Steady sound tone begins] I said, "Well, guys, that's wasteful thinking."

JM: Excuse us. I'm sorry.

[Recording stops and then resumes]

[Laughter and small talk]

JM: John, should we jump back on here?

JB: Yeah, you're on.

JM: Okay. Alrighty.

JB: You're on now.

JM: Okay. Let me ask about a couple of things here as we wind down. Um, you want to tell an important story about the tensions inside, say, the – your work at Sharecroppers, when the people have different ideas about how to go at these problems.

JJ: With the Sharecroppers, there are folks who feel they deserve being paid a lot of money – no identification of what for, but just to do it. What my assignment was at Sharecroppers was to go identify – in Virginia, Georgia, Florida, South Carolina – small farmers.

And I did not deal with the inside of that mechanism. I told them I think there were some opportunities for them to sell their product and make some money. That's the end I worked on. And I worked with, uh, national chain stores and the big chain stores. And I learned in that circle most of the stores was looking for black farmers', small farmers' products. Closer, fresher, a lot cheaper because of the distance. And that worked fine; that was kind of easy. [Laughs]

But what had some of them blocked is they're talking about the, uh, money the big farmers are making, which was not always true, and shipping it all over the country, and you need a lot of volume. And they were looking over the fact that I got five acres of tomatoes that I can harvest four times and I can send it right here to Kroger's, and Kroger's will buy it, which is an excellent marketing strategy. They were looking past that. And that's the kind of stuff I worked with, and they done well.

Now, some of them ended, but that was because the older population, who was farming, their children didn't want to farm and headed to New York. Well, it's time to close that project down. And some folks don't recognize that, and you have to be straight with them, say, "No, you have nobody to run the farm anymore. Don't sell your property. Please don't sell it, because in five or ten years, right here is probably going to be the home of condos, so you'll make plenty of money selling it." So, that's the side I worked on, trying to get them to make money.

JM: Yeah. You mentioned earlier on, talking about yourself and how you could go through this experience, you said you're a realist. You have a kind of a measured sense of outcomes. [45:00] And, uh, being a realist, did you ever have reason to think that, "You know, looked at in some ways, progress is much slower than we all would like on some of the basic economic questions, that maybe the – maybe there's another way to do this, maybe with

institutional racism, those kinds of built-in headwinds, that maybe the integrationist model we had in mind isn't quite the right model?" Anyway, just any second –?

JJ: No, I, uh – my thinking was, in the model, I never did see it like a lot of the guys did, that, uh, the integration thing was, uh, was the model to go with. What I did see, though, is a lot of the white kids who came in and played roles, I would look very closely at. Some of them did have very, very good contacts, parents in big circles, wealthy. And when I, what I, um, zeroed in on: "Give us some contacts in the Northeast or Ohio, where we can possibly, um, do some things." Do some things, because some of the folks in the Movement saw – when the whites came in, they thought they saw money, and money to be brought and put in the pot. But I didn't. I always saw them as potential great contacts to make better outlets.

Uh, for example, I, uh, in Arkansas, one – different kids, I said, "Look, we've got some – we've got these kids, pretty smart. Why don't you –" like we had some kids from Boston, New York, and D.C. – "why don't we go to these kids that's pretty smart and looking to college? Do you in your circle have contact with schools that we might can get scholarships?" That's how I used them. I never had this dream to heaven like a lot of people did, uh-uh.

And I think, I think my background helped me to stay grounded. You know, my, uh, my parents did well in farming, but I saw the grind in it, and I – you know, so, we didn't have this big – [laughs] this big trillion dollar, trillion dollars falling out of the sky. But I think that helped me – grounded. And I think some of the Movement people didn't have that kind of, kind of grounded background, and a lot of that stuff was theory. You know, "We should be able to do this, we should be able –" and sometimes those theories were dependent on the government doing a whole lot of stuff. But the folks you were working with weren't ready for that, at that level of stuff, so that's how I –.

And, and I think, uh, in terms of slow things, yeah, I saw slow development. I saw a lot of things didn't happen. I, I saw things like, um, efforts to try and get, um, more nurses and blacks in nursing, and smaller hospitals in smaller towns, and trying to recruit doctors to come in in those areas and spend time – that didn't happen. I was hoping – that kind of stuff would have made *huge* dents, because you take east, um, Arkansas, and you're looking at folk going all the way to Little Rock or to Memphis, to the big cities. And I looked at that, but that didn't fly. But when it didn't fly, it wasn't something that brought me down, you know, so.

JM: Final thoughts – any?

JJ: I guess, uh, my final thought is my being involved with SNCC was a wonderful thing. I saw a lot of growth in people. I saw a lot of growth in young folks who excelled and went on. Uh, I think some people see that because they did well and moved on was disappointment as opposed to staying where they were and all that, just that [50:00] geographical change, and you can't blame people for that. I felt – I feel real good, years later, that I did pretty good [clears throat] with putting people together on the marketing end and small farmers. Uh, [clears throat] I think I, uh, feel good about when I left, when I left SNCC, I stayed in the rural kind of, uh, area, [clears throat] still working on the behalf of people. And if you look at my resume, every job I've had put me in touch with working with a lot of people, and that's been the joy of my life. I've just loved it.

Don't, don't, don't, don't – [clears throat] probably could have been several other things. I wish the fifty thousand black farmers we had identified in the East and the South and the far South could have been given some payment toward – the government not allowing them to borrow money and all of that. But a lot of those folks, when a decision was made to recognize them, ninety-five percent of those folks was dead and gone, and that level is who should have

been the beneficiary. And now the sons and the daughters of those folks are in Chicago and Detroit and everywhere else. Um, and if there is, uh, a little bit of compensation given, it needs to be *very* carefully done. I would not be real excited about John Doe in Chicago now is thirty-seven years old and does not even know who his granddaddy was that farmed seventy-five years ago. I don't think, you know, that compensates who did the hard work.

But I, but I've been very pleased with, uh, the direction I went in life. I've pretty much been close to agriculture, small towns, all my life, which is what I love doing. Yeah, so.

JM: Mr. Jones, it's [clears throat] it's really been an honor and a great privilege. Thank you so much for sitting down with us.

JJ: Thank you, thank you, thank you. Glad you came by, and – [laughs].

JB: Yeah, it was really, really nice.

JJ: Yeah, yeah.

[Recording ends at 52:52 – part 2 of 2]

END OF INTERVIEW